



JAYNE COLEY

Jayne Coley is a labrador and retriever expert and top level field trialer. She has been both a competitor and a judge at the very pinnacle of the sport, the IGL Retriever Championship. She has made up nine and bred 11 Field Trial Champions, including the 2014 runner-up in the IGL Retriever Championship – Sean McGrath’s four-year-old dog FTCh Waterford Hallmark.



BEN RANDALL

Ben Randall runs Beggbarbush Gundog Kennels and Ledbury Lodge Kennels where he breeds and trains dogs for the shooting field. He is a two-time winner of the Cocker Spaniel Championship and was the 2013 Gundog Trainer of the Year. He was recently a judge at the 2014/15 English Springer Spaniel Championship.

CANINE QUANDARIES

THE PUPPY SPECIAL

Our panel of gundog experts answer your questions.



Q: When I go to visit a litter to choose a puppy, what should I be looking for? They will be almost 8 weeks old.

BEN: Before going to see a litter, do your research and make sure the breeding lines are right for you, with a suitable sire and dam. Different people like a different type of dog – some are after a hot, aggressive puppy whereas others prefer the soft and quiet type.

I follow a similar routine whenever I go to choose a puppy from a litter. I get them all out together, before putting them all away and then, one by one, bringing them out individually and seeing how they interact with

the rest of the litter. Some people look for nice movement, but I think the choice is often largely instinctive. And remember, a good dog is not a bad colour.

JAYNE: First impressions are important. The litter should have received the best start in life, having been fed quality food, kept in clean surroundings and well handled. They should be lively and friendly, have clean shiny coats, look well-rounded and feel solid when you pick them up. The mother of the puppies should look well and have a happy, relaxed disposition. If you

are choosing a bitch puppy, ask for the males to be put away so you can concentrate on studying the girls. If the weather is good, it’s ideal to have them on some grass to watch them play and interact. You might like to see if they will retrieve. A couple of puppies should take your eye, so ask for the others to be put away.

Their eyes should be clean and bright. Check to make sure they do not have hernias. If you are buying a dog puppy, it should already have two little pea-sized testicles which won’t be visible but you should be able to feel.

Q: I am considering investing in the help of a professional gundog trainer, but I am on a limited budget. At what stage in a young dog’s life would it make the most sense to utilise such help?

BEN: When a pup has been bought and vaccinated, I’d recommend seeking advice from as early as possible so that you have a comprehensive plan in place for your dog’s training between the ages of eight weeks and six months old. Ask any professional gundog trainer and they will tell you that they would rather have a client and dog utilising help from the offset, than turn up at the age of six months with lots of bad habits.

Q: After a litter of pups, how long do you recommend a bitch to be left to recover before light training can resume?

JAYNE: The puppies will not be old enough to have had their inoculations (usually given at eight or 10 weeks, then again at 12 weeks), so I would not take the bitch out and about and mixing with other dogs until the puppies have been completely weaned (usually between 5 – 6 weeks), when the bitch no longer has anything to do with them.

After the puppies have been weaned, the bitch can be taken for good walks, at her own pace. After a week or so, I would begin light training, but be careful not to overdo it. I would refrain from any jumping to begin with and be careful when she jumps in and out of your vehicle. If the weather is reasonable, introduce swimming as this is a great way to get her figure back and get her fit again.



Q: I have recently bought a puppy which I plan to train for the shooting field. However, I also have young children. It has been mentioned in a previous issue of this magazine that children should not be allowed to play fetch or tug-of-war type games with the dog. How can I involve the children my pup’s training with no detrimental effects on her progression?

BEN: A gundog can be brought up with children in a house. Anyone within the household should be taught how to treat the dog and be aware of the basic rules – what they can and can’t do. I encourage my clients to bring their children along with them on training sessions so they can get involved. They can do heelwork and help with the feeding routine. The latter also teaches the children a sense of responsibility.

Q: This summer I am planning on getting two gundog pups from the same litter. Is there any reason you would advise against this? And any strict rules I should follow if getting two?

BEN: I would recommend splitting them into different kennels from as young as 12 – 14 weeks old, and do not let them play together. I think their pack instinct can become too strong if they are left together, making training more difficult. Train them separately until both have reached a good level of obedience and competency before gradually introducing each dog to the other’s training regime.

JAYNE: I would recommend just having one puppy. If you have two, they usually just look to one another, instead of seeing you as the pack leader. I think you develop a bond much quicker with one puppy. If two pups play rough on a hard surface regularly it will also not do their growing joints any favours.



Q: At what age should training with my puppy commence, and where do you recommend I begin? How frequent and long should training sessions be?

BEN: Training should commence with what I call ‘foundation training’ – house training and basic obedience around food times. Feeding the pup three or four times a day will provide three or four training opportunities. Keep the sessions short (5 – 15 minutes) and fun. Practice sitting for food and making the dog wait (practising patience), before moving onto recalling away from food and recalling to food. Needless to say, from day one you must establish yourself as pack leader.

